DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 035 333 FL 001 552

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TITLE Programmed Learning as Used in the Tacoma Public Schools.
PUB DATE 69
NOTE 3p.; Included in the Proceedings of the 20th Annual Pacific Northwest Conference on Foreign Languages, April 11-12, 1969, Lewis and Clark College, Portland, Oregon

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.25
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement, Communication Skills, Course Content, Course Descriptions, *Course Objectives, Educational Objectives, Educational Principles, Educational Research, Home Study, Language Instruction, Lesson Plans, Programed Instruction, *Programed Materials, Programed Texts, *Secondary Schools, *Second Language Learning, *Spanish, Teacher Attitudes, Teaching Methods
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ABSTRACT

The "Spanish for Communication" (SFC) materials for foreign language instruction developed by Dr. William Bull are described in this article. Two major components are at the heart of SFC: a teacher's Daily Lesson Plan (DLP) and student programed homework. Now in the fourth year of field testing in the Tacoma (Washington) Public Schools, the materials programed for mastery of instructional objectives are seen as being instrumental in effecting changes in teacher attitude, methodology, and student performance. (RL)

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PROGRAMMED LEARNING AS USED IN THE TACOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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It has been demonstrated that most combinations of foreign language methods and students have produced outstanding students as well as poor ones. Spanish for Communication (SFC) by Dr. William Bull of U.C.L.A. works on the premise that the correct number of tested procedures in the classroom will produce the highest number of successful foreign language students. (It is to be understood that in all that is said herein the teacher always remains the catalyst that determines success.) In the experimental stages of SFC the components have been revised several times to increase the probability that a large majority of students can achieve the objective of the course.

SFC is composed of two major components: a teacher's Daily Lesson Plan (DLP) and student programmed homework. The homework programs teach the concepts to be learned and the DLP provides the class with practice in the skills for communication.

The DLP is essentially a forty minute classroom script (twenty-five minutes for junior highs) which lists the day's activities and a suggested time for each. The DLP relieves the teacher of the need to invent explanations of living phenomena. Rather, the DLP reduces teacher-preparation time and allows the teacher time to concentrate on the execution of the lesson. It provides instructions on how to manage drills, techniques for correction, ways of individualizing instruction, and, most-importantly, solutions for problems encountered by the teachers in the test-teaching programs.

The DLPs are not constructed on a unit prinicple. The entire three-year course is conceived as an educational continuum in which everything is continuously important and nothing is ever definitely finished. Each DLP therefore 1) strengthens items that have already been fairly well mastered, 2) provides practice on items currently being learned, and 3) includes items to get the students ready for what is coming. With this in mind each DLP is designed to captivate the student and to have him respond correctly as often as possible. The elicitation procedure attempts to provide a stimulus to which a student will react with a correct answer. At each step of the program the elicitation procedures and correction procedures try to guarantee student success. In addition to the interest generated by successful answers, student interest is maintained by terminating an activity before negative feedback is registered. The DLP's eight to twelve activities suggest the pace. Fatigue is avoided through spaced learning: the re-introduction of material at specified intervals. This spaced learning differs greatly from the massed learning presently employed.

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An integral part of the DLPs are three factors which greatly aid in the learning process. The first is Dr. Bull's Visual Grammar of Spanish. This is a set of 402 colored posters which depict grammatical structures usually considered stumbling blocks. The posters substitute the reality of language situations for the abstractions of grammatical explanations which confuse and frustrate the student.

Second, the Verb Slots provide a means of showing the morphemic break-down of all verb forms which drastically reduces the number of items to be memorized. Detailed explanations of both the posters and verb charts are given in the appropriate lesson plans.

Third, visual-lingual and visual-graphic drills allow students to manipulate the language while learning under the direction of the teacher. These differ greatly from the tedious repetition tape drills. It is here that a student puts into practice some of the concepts he has learned and partially practiced.

In attempting to achieve the instructional objectives in SFC, students prepare themselves through their homework programs. The programs are the prime instrument for teaching most of the information the students are going to learn, and by the third semester they are often the only way in which the student is given the extra practice needed to memorize vocabulary, idioms, and fixed expressions. Since no provision is made for reteaching in the classroom what students fail to learn at home, teachers and students must understand this and adjust to a different attitude toward homework; they should understand it would take about forty-four more class hours per semester to reteach the content of all programs. Because of their previous conditioning many students expect reteaching to take place and they find it difficult to accept their new responsibility. Their new responsibility must also direct them to be honest and not cheat themselves by peeking at the answer frame. Honesty requires that students no longer hand in work sheets which have merely been copied to give the appearance of fulfilling assignments. The teacher must indicate that with a little effort previous feelings of futility can be replaced by successful experiences. If he takes the positive approach that a student can do well, the teacher finds that students want him to be successful because success and failure are now being shared.

The programmed homework provides the students the opportunity to learn certain linguistic principles of Spanish which they are to practice the following day in class. The principal advantage of the programmed homework is that each student progresses in a logical sequence to the understanding of a linguistic principle. The fact that any student can go to class as well prepared as the best student, as far as linguistic problems are concerned, is one of the outstanding features of these materials. A second advantage is that each student knows what he is to work on the next day in class. For example, of a student understands that the phoneme "d" in English has only one sound while the Spanish "d" has two allophones, and if he learns under what circumstances each occurs, then the student has learned to deal with the problem rather than have it become a hit-and-miss matter every time he has to sound the d. At the present time, the rules that are contained in grammar books are not always easy to grasp. Dr. Bull has attempted to

simplify rules and generalizations as much as possible. In this way, the student grasps the underlying principle of most linguistic problems, such as the perennial dilemma of ser and estar.

The field testing in the Tacoma Public Schools is in its fourth year. The teachers have contributed immensely because they have been able to see some of their comments incorporated in the revised portions. The biweekly meetings of all Spanish teachers have solidified a group which is willing to mention specific classroom difficulties and have the group suggest new approaches. One example is that teachers have had to learn that success is predicated on students' doing their homework everyday with care and attention.

Through workshop sessions teachers have become aware that lowering the level of difficulty as part of their elicitation procedure becomes an essential part of every difficult activity. The DLP design is particularly helpful to participating in cooperative teaching situations because it allows them to concentrate on a particular reoccurring activity so that with the proper critiques they acquire greater skill in presenting that activity.

The Tacoma teachers who originally experienced misgivings concerning timed activities and a highly-organized DLP, began to accept SFC when they realized that the instructional objectives were being attained. Their time spent on the script does produce handsome dividends. Now, they are anxiously awaiting the fall, 1971, publication date. But although this will be a very satisfying occasion for them, perhaps the teachers' greatest satisfaction is seeing that the students are understanding what and why they are doing rather than just doing.